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BUREAU OF
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(U) SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA^{1/}

Summary

Soviet scholarly writings on contemporary China have been largely neglected in the West. But recent research on this material not only has cast new light on Soviet perceptions of China but also has exposed differing views about socialism in general among groups of academic specialists in the USSR.

A survey of available Soviet academic output over the last 14 years (1968-82) reveals diverse views on Chinese developments grouped around orthodox and pragmatic interpretations of socialism. Part of this dichotomy in the outlook on China may be due to the organizational structure of the Soviet community of China watchers.

Orthodox viewers were dominant throughout the period; but dissenters never fell silent, though their opposition always was muted. Moreover, the two camps existed rather isolated from each other, published their findings separately, and rarely referred to each other's output.

The issue which seems to have agitated both groups most is what went wrong with Chinese socialism. It is here where possible allusions to the

^{1/} The principal findings in this paper are based on a monograph of the same title by Gilbert Rozman, Princeton University. Rozman's work was commissioned by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, which is supported by funds from the Departments of Defense and State, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the US Government.

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- Soviet experience loom largest. The mainstream Soviet experts seem to strive to divert any comparison between de-Stalinization and de-Maoization by placing all blame for the deformation of Chinese socialism on the resurgence of rightist tendencies. In contrast, the pragmatic scholars see the greatest danger in the drive for recentralization of control in the state rather than in the burgeoning power of such social and political forces as peasants, intellectuals, and traditional associations.

What, if any, influence these differing expert views on China have on Soviet decisionmakers is less clear. Given the normally tight rein on Soviet academic research, however, this prolonged scholarly dispute concerning Chinese contemporary developments suggests a link with possible disagreement among Soviet leaders on that issue as well as on broader questions affecting the future of socialism. There is good reason, therefore, for continued monitoring of this literature for clues about Soviet elite thinking on China and socialism in general.

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Organizational Structure

Soviet specialists' differing interpretations of China need to be seen in the context of the actual course of Sino-Soviet relations. For the bulk of the more than two decades since the onset of the Sino-Soviet discord, hardliners have dominated Soviet China watchers. When the short-lived Institute of Chinese Studies closed its doors in the early 1960s, there followed a hiatus of 5-6 years during which Soviet leaders seem to have debated what to do with the field of Chinese studies. Contemporary work on China lagged as some scholars concentrated on working on pre-revolutionary China and others moved to institutes where China was of peripheral interest. Nevertheless, these individuals did not abandon Chinese studies altogether and seem to have provided the impetus later for a more pragmatic approach to Chinese politics.

The main strain of China watchers came into existence in the late 1960s. This group was composed largely of newly trained people affiliated with the Institute of the Far East directed by M. I. Sladkovski. But in the allocation of responsibilities, leadership in the China field was largely in the hands of O. B. Rakhmanin, S. L. Tikhvinsky, and M. S. Kapitsa. This powerful trio helped set the hardline orientation for Chinese studies which has remained dominant to this day.

Work from this group soon began to appear in authoritative newspapers and journals. In the early 1970s, the Institute of the Far East began to publish a yearbook on China and a journal titled Far Eastern Affairs. Later the Institute, tightly controlled by these three men, also trained and graduated about 10 specialists annually in Chinese studies. These scholars were expected to carry on a hardline orientation emphasizing the negative in Chinese affairs, regardless of developments in China.

Against this chorus of criticism of China, a more nuanced analysis of Chinese politics was barely audible through the 1970s. It gained greater strength after Mao's death and again in the wake of the partial rapprochement between the two communist giants in 1981-82. This view on China, however, came from institutes not specifically devoted to Chinese studies. Notable have been the Institute of Oriental Studies where L. P. Deliusin is chief of Chinese studies; the Institute of the International Workers' Movement--V. G. Gel'bras, section chief; the Moscow State Institute of

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International Relations--A. V. Meliksetov, head of Chinese studies; and the Institute of the USA and Canada--V. P. Lukin, section chief. Outside academia, such well-known political observers as Alexander Bovin and P. M. Burlatsky also have promoted a new look at China.

Muted Dissent

Established Soviet practice emphasizes unity of views, and efforts are constantly being made to mute differences in the field of Chinese studies. The fact that dissenters from the hardline view are scattered in many institutes, however, not only affords them protection but also avoids the impression of a concerted attack on what is still the dominant orientation.

Still, the question remains how these mavericks have managed to operate when their powerful opponents obviously would have liked to silence them. One can only speculate as to who supports them further up the line, but it would appear that they enjoy some protection from their respective institutes, the Academy of Science Administrators, and other high officials. In some instances specific linkages can be established; e. g., Gel'bras and A. M. Rumiantsev, a member of the Academy of Sciences; and Burlatsky and G. A. Arbatov, Director of the Institute of the USA and Canada.

The head of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Deliusin, was associated with Andropov before the latter became head of the KGB. Whether this connection offered Deliusin a protective mantle cannot be stated with certainty. However, he has come to be regarded as one of the foremost China experts and his annual conferences on China have attracted large contingents of experts from all over the world. What is more, Deliusin's personal ties to a number of the more pragmatic scholars on China have made him the unofficial spokesman of an academic camp known for its nuanced interpretation of contemporary Chinese developments.

Socialism Under Scrutiny

One of the key issues threading itself through the work of many Soviet China watchers is the nature of the class struggle and its effect on the deformation of Chinese socialism; here can be found the most visible clues in the approach of the pragmatic group regarding possible similarities between Stalinism and Maoism. While there is never any direct reference to deviations from socialism in the Soviet Union similar to Mao's, the careful reader clearly is made aware of them.

The conservative school of thought, on the other hand, stresses dissimilarities. The Chinese, though fulfilling many of

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the requisite conditions for a transition to socialism in 1949, forfeited their opportunity principally because of the wrongheaded leadership of the Communist Party. Failure to understand Marxism-Leninism, lack of background and experience, and insufficient control over bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences caused the Chinese leaders to adopt incorrect policies. In short, insufficient ideological education and political control were decisive in dooming the efforts of the Chinese Communist Party.

In spite of this emphasis on the dissimilar, Soviet conservative writers also condemn the Chinese system for excesses reminiscent of the Stalinist era. The brutal nature of collectivization is cited, as is the lack of consumer goods and housing construction, the tragic consequences of the personality cult, and the existence of forced labor. Lest the comparison become too inescapable, these writers take refuge in Lenin as the proper point of reference and suggest that Chinese transgressions were considerably worse than those under Stalin even though the latter are not acknowledged specifically.

Consistent with their depreciation of Chinese developments in the post-Mao period, the hardliners argue that Maoism continues in China without Mao. They see rightist tendencies and anarchy and depict China as constantly moving further from socialism.

A rather different tack is taken by the more pragmatic Soviet writers. Obviously, their way of drawing parallels between deformities in China under Mao and in the Soviet system is indirect and found only in widely scattered publications. The shift in emphasis, however, is unmistakable. While the conservatives attribute the failures of the Mao leadership to its inability to overcome the influence of Chinese history and culture, the pragmatists see insufficient awareness of that past as a major stumbling bloc in developing a proper socialist China. This context provides the background for sharply opposed conclusions regarding the primary source of the serious problems plaguing today's China.

China Really Means the Soviet Union

Four key issues affecting contemporary China, but not it alone, provide the basis for these contrasting assessments: the place of expert knowledge in society, the extent of popular participation in decisionmaking, the importance of material well-being of the population, and the extent of legal checks on the power of officials.

Regarding experts--i.e., intellectuals--Soviet pragmatists argue that their abuse harmed the building of Chinese socialism. By defending the need for critical and independent judgment in the policy process, the pragmatists seem to enshrine the primacy of

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expertness over ideological orthodoxy. Soviet hardliners, however, oppose such championing of intellectuals and warn of the group's continued bourgeois influence. Rather than trusting intellectuals, they see in the failure to reeducate them after the revolution both the error of Mao's way and a continuing threat to the future of Chinese socialism.

This reaffirmation by Soviet hardliners of the commanding role of politics emerges most strongly in their appreciation of the role of officials and the party in China. China's problems, they aver, can be met best by centralization and discipline. A more tightly run Communist Party and the elimination of the last vestiges of influence of the national bourgeoisie seem necessary elements for redressing China's flawed socialism. Opponents of the hardliners, on the other hand, speak of the need for eradicating the privileged position of the ruling stratum as essential for the de-Maoization of Chinese society. Such criticism is advanced with caution, but is reflected in the call for a new breed of officials, better educated and more accessible to experts as well as more humane in methods of governance.

This recognition of the value of intellectuals also extends to other social classes in China. It entrusts older, qualified, and experienced workers and peasants with greater responsibility and sides with experts in the perennial debate between "red" and "expert." A corollary of this view is the acceptance of greater worker participation in the decisionmaking process and awareness of the need for more effective representation of worker interests. The implicit accession to the demand for a certain diffusion of power also clashes with the hardline perspective of continued centralization and tighter discipline.

Soviet scholars disagree on the importance of the question of improving the material well-being of the Chinese population. For the pragmatists the system's success is most likely to be effected by encouraging production through material incentives. Moreover, peasants who prosper as the result of hard work deserve praise, suggesting the virtue of a concessionary attitude on the part of the regime toward the people's desire for an expanded private sector. In contrast, the conservative Soviet view is guarded about the advantage of emphasizing material awards, seeing in it a threat to central planning and party control over the economy which ultimately would turn China to the right.

In the area of legal procedures, Soviet analysts again occupy contrasting positions in their evaluations of individual rights and obligations to the state. Although neither group is optimistic about early positive changes in the post-Mao period, the pragmatists derive some hope from the ostensibly more relaxed current official position toward intellectuals and the recognition of the

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need for material incentives. The conservatives, not surprisingly, see danger in bourgeois forms of reward and deem improvement possible only by a redirection of Chinese foreign policy and greater reliance on control emanating from the Chinese Communist Party. Their view of progress in China seems almost to boil down to a formula which tends to equate the health of China's society with the extent of its fealty to the Soviet Union.

Sectarians Versus Pragmatists: The Old Debate

However indirect, the essential concern reflected in these views is the impact of certain institutional processes on the socialist systems in both the Soviet Union and China. In this general sense, the debate keeps alive the longtime argument between Soviet conservatives and pragmatists. The former always see the threat to the system as coming from internal and external bourgeois influence, which must be combatted by strengthened controls and greater discipline. The pragmatists regard the stifling role of the state as the principal obstacle to the survival of socialism which can be overcome only by relaxed controls and greater involvement of the individual in the decisionmaking process.

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